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COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL  
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# SPEECH

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BILINGUALISM IN CANADIAN  
UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES  
- OR - POST-SECONDARY  
EDUCATION IN THE LANGUAGE  
OF THE OFFICIAL MINORITY  
FOR WHOM? WHY? AND HOW?

An address by  
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The Canadian Society  
for the Study of Higher  
Education

Winnipeg, June 1, 1986



Bonjour Mesdames et Messieurs, Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to College St-Boniface. I am pleased and honoured to join you today as you continue your third day of exploring various cultural dimensions of post-secondary education in Canada; and in this context, to present my thoughts on the important and challenging issue of where we should be going with bilingualism in Canadian universities and colleges.

On a broad level, I find the timing of this conference and its focus on the interplay between culture and education to be very appropriate. There are some very important changes afoot in Canada at the present time. We are beginning to discover what it means to have a new Constitution and Charter of Rights as the courts begin to rule on cases brought forward. And as our representatives sit at the table in free trade talks with our neighbour to the South, the citizens of this country have reason to consider collectively once again what it means to be Canadian, what it means to be able to express Canadian values in how we live and work together in this particular part of the world. A key distinguishing feature here is the presence of the English and French languages and the communities that speak them. As the Governor General stated in the most recent speech from the Throne, our two official languages are "vital to our national character and identity."

I also find the physical setting for today's discussion very fitting. Growing out of a school originally founded in the 1800's, College St-Boniface has a long history of offering education in French to Manitoba's Francophone minority as well as to Francophones from other, predominantly western, provinces. With the recent establishment of its research centre on Francophone minorities, the College has taken an important new step on behalf both of minority communities across the country and of everyone interested in acquiring a greater knowledge and appreciation of the culture of French-speaking Canadians.

The fact that this conference is being held in Manitoba is also not without significance. The people and the Government of this Province are actively engaged in the process of recognizing French as an official language for the province. In addition, the provincial Government has taken the important step of setting up a body it calls the Education Rights Review to consider the province's constitutional obligations regarding Francophone management of French schools. The outcome of both these endeavours will have an important impact not only on the use of French in this province, but on the evolution of the collective Canadian consciousness in language matters.

And now, to the theme for today's sessions:  
Bilingualism in Canadian universities and colleges - OR -



post-secondary education in the language of the official minority. For whom? Why? And how?

As I am sure we are all aware, these are complex questions, ones which draw us into contemplation of difficult contradictions and competing needs. Finding the answer - or answers - will take us on a journey over largely unmapped terrain to a destination which we, as a country, will have to define.

What we want to avoid at the outset is the temptation to start rushing off in all directions at once. To use our energies to best advantage, we need to work together to arrive at a reasonably clear and commonly-held idea of what the overall purpose of the journey is and what our basic direction should be as we start out. As the Cheshire Cat so aptly said to Alice when she asked him which way she ought to go from here, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."

What I want to do today is give you my assessment of the lie of the land as I see it at present, share my thoughts on where I think we should want to get to, and outline some basic principles to help us keep our bearings as we go and avoid losing the way.

I should note in passing that, while English is the minority language in Quebec, I will be focussing on the issue of French-language education, not because I think English-language higher education in Quebec is unimportant or problem-free, but because it is primarily in the area of French-language higher education outside Quebec that we are struggling to break new ground.

As I see it, it is useful to start by looking at developments across the country, several of which are currently affecting education at the primary and secondary levels. Since there is much more going on than I can go into in detail here, I would like to focus on a few topics which I find of particular significance. These are: the Churchill study on the education circumstances and needs of Franco-Ontarians, key developments in minority and French second language education across the country and the impact of the Charter of Rights.

The results of the Churchill study, carried out for the Conseil de l'éducation franco-ontarienne and published in November 1985, are extremely sobering.

Particularly distressing are the unusually high drop-out rates among Francophones before the end of highschool. The most recent statistics available to the researchers showed that the chances of minority students going past Grade 12 level studies were only 72% as good as



those of non-Francophones in the province. So-called "mixed" or bilingual schools have even higher drop-out rates. In schools where Francophones constitute less than half the school's population, the likelihood of their going on to Grade 13 was 53% that of their English schoolmates. Even in schools where there is abundant French programming and Francophones are the majority in the school, their chances rise only marginally to 57%.

Another general problem is that a much lower proportion of Francophone students study maths and sciences at the junior high and high school level, owing to a variety of factors. The result is that significant numbers of students are not academically equipped to pursue the advanced training necessary for scientific or technologically-oriented careers.

I would suspect, despite the uniqueness of Franco-phone minority histories in each province, that similar findings with similar, if not worse, implications might well be discovered in other provinces if comparable studies were to be undertaken there.

With regard to minority language education across the country, the proportion of children who have access to schooling in their own language is slowly and painfully growing. In absolute terms, their numbers are in general decline. This is not surprising, given current rates of language transfer and the overall drop in the school-age population.

The major force for change in this area is obviously the Charter of Rights and its linguistic guarantees. As things stand now, there is a huge gap between these guarantees and what Francophone communities outside Quebec actually have in the way of education in their own language. As Professor Pierre Foucher, author of the comprehensive report Constitutional Language Rights of Official Language Minorities in Canada, has pointed out, with the exception of Quebec and New Brunswick, no province complies fully at the moment with Section 23 guarantees on minority education. He notes that, in fact, most existing provincial education legislation is, in this context, "by and large invalid."

Happily, some provinces have taken the initiative to clarify the definition and application of these rights within their school systems. Ontario, for example, requested an interpretation of Section 23 by the Ontario Court of Appeal and is proceeding with legislation for the Francophone management of French schools. And, as I mentioned, Manitoba has established the Educational Rights Review to look onto the question of its constitutional obligations. Other



provinces, such as Alberta, are waiting for individual cases to be decided by the courts before taking action.

Meanwhile, important developments are also taking place in French second-language education. These include: continually expanding immersion enrolments, assessment of students skills, and evidence of a growing debate about the goals and priorities of second-language learning across the country.

If current estimates are accurate, as of 1985-86, some 178,000 students are enrolled in immersion programs across the country. This figure represents more than five times the 1977-78 enrolment of 38,000 students. While immersion pupils represent only 4% of Anglophone pupils in all grades nationwide, it is significant that almost 10% of Anglophones in their first year of school are enrolled in immersion. Assuming that a high proportion of these students continue on in the program, there will be large numbers of high school immersion graduates ready for post-secondary studies by the mid-to-late 1990's.

The proportion of students in core French programs at all grade levels has meanwhile shown a moderate increase from 44.7% nationally in 1970-71 to 50.3% or approximately 2 million students in 1985-86.

While demand for immersion programs, particularly early immersion programs, continues to grow, countervailing influences are beginning to be felt in several communities across the country. Some of the questions that are being asked, often in quite heated fashion, include: should immersion programs be allowed to grow without limitations? Are these programs conferring elitist advantages on a relatively small number of children at the expense of the rest? What sort of second language competence can students in regular core French programs realistically hope to achieve? Would it be more cost-effective and beneficial to larger numbers of students if early immersion programs were curtailed and the money channelled into extended or enriched core French? How are students to maintain the French language skills they have acquired if there is no provision for appropriate follow-up activities?

One of the problems in resolving these questions is that evaluation of immersion programs is still embryonic. The immersion phenomenon in Canada is little more than 15 years old and research results on outcomes thus far - not only pedagogical, but also professional, social and political outcomes - are inconclusive. Although teachers and students are generally happy with students' speaking and listening skills in French, high school immersion students, in particular, are signalling that more attention must be paid to the development of good writing skills.



Parents who do not want to see access to immersion restricted are arguing, informally at this point, that some of the guarantees for French language instruction under Section 23 of the Charter also apply to immersion. No case has yet wound its way through the courts, and it is unclear at this point what the outcome of such a case would be. Professor Foucher has said that while he personally is in favour of immersion, it is his opinion that the Charter does not cover immersion, that the purpose of the legislation is clearly to protect minority education rights. Moreover, he believes that interpreting the Charter to include immersion would be disastrous for minority rights since it would mean that provinces could satisfy the Charter by providing Francophones with French immersion education, a development which would only fuel the fires of assimilation.

All this to say that the lie of the land, the terrain in which we must chart a course for French language education at the elementary and secondary levels is extremely changeable, and that meeting Charter guarantees will likely entail major changes in provincial school structures across the country.

Returning to the main theme of our journey, let me say something now about where it is that I think we should want to get to with bilingualism at the post-secondary level.

Canada, as we all know, is a country tremendously rich in natural resources, for which we are justifiably envied by many countries around the world. Just as, if not more important in several respects, however, are our human resources. As a trading nation in an increasingly competitive world, if we are to push beyond our off-cited roles as hewers of wood and drawers of water and mature as a modern society, we must cultivate and nurture, honour and celebrate the special skills and talents of as many of our citizens as possible. To cite Matthew Arnold from Culture and Anarchy: "Culture, which is the study of perfection leads us ... to conceive of true human perfection as harmonious perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as a general perfection, developing all parts of our society. For if one member suffers, the other members must suffer with it; and the fewer there are that follow the way to salvation, the harder that way is to find."

I think our basic goal at the post-secondary level should be two-fold: one - to provide minority Francophones with higher education opportunities in their own language equivalent to those available to Anglophones, thus enabling Francophones to add, in due measure, their creativity, visions and leadership abilities to the pool of human capital we have in Canada to draw on; and two - to help develop skilled workers and leaders from within English-speaking



Canada who are reasonably at home with their second official language and who have both an understanding of and a sensitivity towards both of Canada's two official language communities.

We basically have two main "client" groups, then, to plan for - those whose first or main language of use is French and those whose first or main language of use is English. If we count the English-speaking graduates of French immersion and core French programs separately, we have three client groups. I would argue that it is important to respond to the needs of each, but that in the immediate future, the needs of minority Francophones must be given priority.

Ultimately, there is a direct convergence of interests between these two groups - between Francophones wanting to retain and study in their mother tongue and Anglophones who want to develop and maintain their French language skills. Access to higher education French-language programs and support services will be important for both. And for French to be a natural and integral part of their post-secondary experience, both will need access to French cultural activities, to an authentic cultural environment which allows them to explore and share - through the medium of French - parts of themselves that go beyond the academic pursuits of the classroom and the study hall.

However, I would argue that the situation of the two main groups is fundamentally different at present. Anglophones who want to study French or study in French at the post-secondary level are primarily engaged in enhancing their post-secondary education experience. As we have noted, it appears difficult at this point for proportionate numbers of Francophones to get a post-secondary education at all. In the studies done in Ontario, this difficulty appears related not only to deficiencies in French language schooling available to the Francophone minority at the elementary and secondary level, but also to a lack of post-secondary French programming.

Altogether, there are 70 degree granting universities and more than 150 community colleges across Canada at present. There are, however, essentially only two degree granting French-language post-secondary institutions outside Quebec, l'Université de Moncton in New Brunswick and l'Université Ste-Anne in Nova Scotia. Francophones in other provinces must either go to Quebec, attend a bilingual university or college or enroll in an English-language institution.

We simply cannot afford the economic and social consequences of continuing to undereducate our Francophone minorities outside Quebec. The costs in social and economic terms are too high. In addition to the findings I have



already cited, other studies in Ontario (which I cite in the absence of equivalent studies in other provinces as yet) are very telling. For example, a 1985 report for l'Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario showed that 31% of Franco-Ontarians from 25-64 years of age currently have less than eight years of schooling and are, in the context of our society, functionally illiterate. UNESCO places the rate of functional illiteracy for Canadians as a whole at approximately 15%. As well, a study done for the Social Planning Council in Ottawa showed that there is a major shortage of French-speaking professionals in the health and social services in Ontario, compounding the difficulties of trying to make needed French-language services available. And the Bovey Commission on the Future Development of Universities in Ontario underlined that the lowest Francophone post-secondary participation rates are in those areas of study judged most valuable to the country's future economic growth and development.

All right. How do we start solving the dual challenge of offering sound-quality French-language higher education for Francophone minorities outside Quebec and responding appropriately to Anglophone interest in post-secondary French-language education?

Ideally, what I would like to see over the long-term, is the establishment of at least one French-language institution in each region of the country, institutions that minority Francophones would be able to identify with in the way that their Anglophone counterparts can identify with the English-language institutions available to them.

In the short-term, I think we want to avoid trying to set up higher education courses in French all over the map. In the short-term, I think it important for post-secondary institutions to make special efforts, such as those outlined in the Churchill report, to assist minority Francophone students. These include such things as schemes to provide special help to assist young Francophones to study at the post-secondary level now, as well as beginning recruitment programs in junior high school to encourage minority students to plan for post-secondary study.

There are other things that can be done by individual institutions as well to create a sound base for planning French post-secondary programming - such as establishing a senior officer to study and report on bilingualism to the president of the institution in question; naming Francophone minority and other community representatives to sit on the Board of Governors; and exploring how to use French language resources as creatively as possible; (for example, developing vehicles for long-distance teaching to reach small or scattered



populations). Several institutions have already taken this kind of action. I would urge others to follow suit.

In addition, I think that we need to know more than we do at present about the circumstances and needs of those wishing to study in French across the country. The Churchill report calls for a Royal Commission to be established in Ontario to look into the question of French-language post-secondary education in greater depth. Similar in-depth studies in other provinces, not only of priority Francophone needs, but also of the specific interests and needs of non-Francophone students concerning post-secondary education in French, would be invaluable. Post-secondary institutions in each province would be doing us all a great service if they were to collectively encourage provincial governments to initiate such studies.

Whatever actions are taken - and I realize that different situations may well require different approaches - I think there are four basic touchstones which I would suggest to help us keep our bearings over the next while:

- one - the importance of consultation with the individuals and communities on whose behalf post-secondary education in French is to be established;
- two -the importance of defining clear objectives for all courses and programs to be offered in French, including clear definition of who the main student client group is to be in each case - minority Francophones or Anglophone immersion or core French graduates;
- three - the importance of approaching the whole question of bilingualism in education in a cooperative rather than a competitive spirit so that post-secondary institutions can benefit from each other's efforts and experience and come up with innovative, cost-effective solutions that will be in the best interests of students seeking higher education opportunities in French across the country;
- four - the importance of encouraging both federal and provincial governments to give appropriate financial support for French post-secondary education opportunities and to devote attention to this issue when the current federal-provincial protocols on official languages in education are renegotiated in 1988.

The post-secondary institutional community has already taken an important step in issuing, through the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, a formal



Statement on Bilingualism on October 10, 1985. It would perhaps be useful in the near future to hold a national working colloquium on the subject of post-secondary education in French. One outcome could be the establishment of a suitable mechanism for regular information sharing and periodic discussion of new approaches and developments on the post-secondary front in the various provinces.

Charting the way forward in the specific area of French at the post-secondary level is, I admit, no small challenge, particularly in times of economic restraint. But I firmly believe that properly approached, difficult challenges can work to our advantage. If we are prepared to look at things with fresh eyes, they can help us to push beyond our current limitations, to develop a clearer understanding of what it is that really matters to us, and to find new ways of expressing it in our individual and collective actions.

I believe that the dual goal of providing comparable post-secondary educational opportunities for French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians, and developing skilled workers and leaders from both linguistic communities is not beyond our reach. We owe it to our children and to their children after them to achieve it. As Georges Bernanos said, "Le monde va être jugé par les enfants."

The journey we are embarking upon will test our wisdom, our tenacity and our ingenuity. It will teach us much about our common strengths and our ability to share with each other, our fellow Canadians, the best of ourselves.

When we come upon the inevitable hurdles or stretches of difficult terrain that lie ahead, we need to remember what it was we set out to do and why. We need to keep our sights clear, and keep laying claim not only to our sense of who we are, but to our vision of who we hope to be - as individuals and as a country. I believe that as long as we do that, we will surely find our way.

Thank you.









